



Situation Update

Easter Sunday Bomb Attacks in Sri Lanka

21st April 2019

Six explosions were reported on the morning of Easter Sunday targeting three churches and three five-star hotels in Sri Lanka. St Anthony's Church, Kochchikade, St Sebastian's Church, Negombo, Zion Church in Batticaloa, as well as Shangri La, Cinnamon Grand and Kingsbury hotels in Colombo were the targets in a number of bombings, the first of which is reported to have taken place at approximately 08:45 a.m. The explosions targeted Easter Sunday worship services and Easter breakfast buffets organised by hotels. Malcolm Ranjith, Archbishop of the Catholic Church, announced that all evening services in Catholic churches in the Colombo district had been cancelled.

The explosion at the Zion Church in Batticaloa took place at around 09:15 a.m. and resulted in the deaths of about 28 people. Women and children are among the dead and law enforcement officials have cordoned off the crime scene. According to an NCEASL source, police found an undetonated explosive device in Batticaloa town.

Media reports stated that 215 people have been killed and 469 injured following the attacks. Seventy-two casualties have been reported from Negombo, the highest number of casualties reported thus far. Eleven foreign nationals are also reportedly among the dead. The death toll as at 05:20 on the 21st is as follows:

- National Hospital: 73 dead, 260 injured
- Kalubowila Hospital: 02 dead, 06 injured
- Negombo Hospital: 104 Dead, 100 injured
- Katana Church: 31 Dead
- Ragama Hospital: 7 Dead, 32 injured
- Batticaloa: 28 dead, 51 injured (a source for the NCEASL reported 35 casualties in Batticaloa)

No one has claimed responsibility for the attacks thus far, and security and intelligence services are yet to issue a statement on who is suspected to be responsible for the attacks. Security around the capital and the Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) has been increased following the blasts.

The Ministry of Education has declared all government schools closed tomorrow and the day after (22nd and 23rd April). The Prime Minister convened an emergency meeting at the Ministry of Defence and parliament will convene an emergency session on Tuesday. The

government and the media continuously implored the public to refrain from sharing unverified and unconfirmed information via social media platforms, and to remain indoors.

At approximately 02:00 p.m., yet another explosion was reported at an inn in Dehiwala. Details and motivations surrounding this incident remain unclear. Two victims were admitted to the Kalubowila Hospital and subsequently succumbed to their injuries. Police confirmed another explosion at a housing complex in Dematagoda at around 02:40 p.m., followed by minor additional explosions in the same area. Three police officers were killed in these blasts. Police also discovered a suspicious package on Jampettah Street in Colombo and explosive materials in a house close to the Dematagoda blast site.

At a press conference, Police Media Spokesperson Ruwan Gunasekera elaborated on the incident in Dematagoda stating the police were following a lead from Shangri La Hotel where two men had checked into the hotel using an address in Dematagoda. Law enforcement arrived at this address and after an exchange of gunfire, a bomb was detonated by the suspect.

The government imposed an island-wide police curfew until further notice and issued a temporary ban on social media to prevent the spread of misinformation.

President Maithripala Sirisena returned to the island following a personal overseas visit and announced that he would appoint a special committee headed by a Supreme Court Justice to investigate the attacks.

An undetonated improvised explosive device (IED) was diffused by the Air Force close to the BIA.

A petrol bomb attack on a mosque and an arson attack on a Muslim-owned house were reported from Puttalam.¹ No casualties were reported, and the mosque suffered minor damages while the house was completely destroyed.

A further four Muslim-owned businesses in Murunkan Town, Mannar were attacked with stones and glass bottles and suffered minor damages.²

22nd April 2019

The police curfew was lifted at 06:00 a.m., on the 22nd. A special party leaders' meeting will convene at 02:00 p.m.

As at the morning of 22nd April 2019, 24 suspects have been arrested in connection with the bombings and were questioned by the Criminal Investigation Department. According to the police, the death toll has increased to 290 and reported injuries to 500.

The Government Analyst has confirmed that suicide bombers carried out the attacks at all the churches and hotels.

¹ Information relayed to NCEASL from a single source

² Ibid

The remains of 12 victims were released to their families in Batticaloa. 14 children below the age of 14 are among the deceased.³

The Colombo Stock Exchange temporarily suspended trading and the US and UK issued travel advisories to their nationals travelling to and currently in Sri Lanka.

87 low-intensity detonators were discovered in Bastian Lane, near the Pettah private bus stand. Another explosion took place at approximately 04:00 p.m., near the premises of St Anthony's Church in Kochchikade when the STF was diffusing a bomb found in an abandoned van. Media reports state this was a controlled explosion.

At a press conference held by government ministers, Dr Rajitha Senarathne confirmed that foreign intelligence agencies had submitted information about a group named National Thowheed Jamaath who had been planning a series of suicide bombings. A letter dated 11th April 2019 was circulated among social media platforms, naming members of the group and outlining their plans. This letter was initially said to be fake but was later authenticated by the cabinet of ministers.

Minister Kabir Hashim, at the same press conference, stated that one of the suicide bombers was arrested on suspicion of vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella last year. The suspect was later released.

The government declared April 23rd a national day of mourning and a police curfew was reinstated from 08:00 p.m. to 04:00 a.m.

The All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama released a statement strongly condemning the attacks and called on all mosques to hoist a white flag in solidarity with the Christian community and raise funds on behalf of the affected families.

President Sirisena issued an Extraordinary Gazette promulgating a state of emergency and bringing into effect terrorism prevention laws; effective as of midnight on the 22nd of April.

23rd April 2019

The death toll following the Easter Sunday bombings soared to **321 casualties and 521 injured**. 40 suspects have been arrested to date, across the island; including a Syrian national.

At the special parliamentary sitting convened today, State Minister of Defence Ruwan Wijewardene stated that initial investigation reveal Easter Sunday attacks were carried out by a local group in response to the Christchurch mosque shooting in March 2019.

All police stations in Colombo were advised to be on high alert for a van and a lorry said to be carrying explosives into the city.

According to media reports, ISIS, through its AMAQ new agency claimed responsibility for the attacks but offered no evidence to support its claim.

³ Ibid

New Zealand PM, Jacinda Arden, states that her government was not aware of any intelligence suggesting connections between the incidents in Christchurch and the attacks on Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka.

Addressing the media, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith requested all Catholic Churches to refrain from conducting services until further notice.

24th April 2019

As at 09:45 a.m., the death toll following the attacks stands at 359, including 39 foreigners.

09:54 a.m.—Police investigating a suspicious motorbike parked outside the Savoy cinema in Wellawatta set off a controlled explosion to open the seat of the bike. No explosives were found.

11:00 a.m.—Police spokesperson states 09 suicide bombers were involved in the Easter Sunday attacks and 08 have been identified. 60 persons have been arrested.

12:00 p.m.—Security forces performed a controlled explosion on a mysterious bag found in a restaurant in Katana.

12:15 p.m.—Emergency regulations gazetted by the President is made available to the public.

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